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THE SOUTHERN EUROPEAN WELFARE MODEL IN THE POST-INDUSTRIAL ORDER

Still a distinctive cluster?

Pau Marí-Klose
Departamento de Psicología y Sociología, Universidad de Zaragoza
Francisco Javier Moreno-Fuentes
Institute of Public Goods and Policies (IPP-CSIC), Madrid, Spain

ABSTRACT: The discussion on the existence of a distinctive 'Mediterranean' welfare model has focused on the historical and politico-institutional dynamics, as well as on the policy traits of the welfare arrangements found in Southern European countries. Particular attention has been given to the external pressures and internal constraints faced by the welfare systems of these countries, as well as to what extent there is a common response to such challenges. In this article, we claim that while researchers were embarked in this scholarly effort, Southern European societies kept changing, transforming the nature of existing arrangements in not always forecasted directions, to the point of questioning the adequacy of clustering them under a common type. The current context of economic and financial crisis introduces additional factors in the process of transformation and reform of the welfare schemes of these countries, placed at the epicentre of the turmoil shattering European economies and societies.
Key words: Mediterranean Welfare regime; new social risks; economic crisis; welfare reform

1. The architecture of the South European welfare (as we know it)[1]

In a seminal article written in the mid 1990s, Ferrera drew attention to the poor characterisation of the Mediterranean welfare state in the scholarly literature (Ferrera 1996). Latin countries (and especially Spain, Portugal

1. This article was drafted within the SOLFCARE project ('*Solidaridad familiar, cambio actitudinal y reforma del Estado de bienestar en España: el familismo en transición*'), under the 'Plan Nacional de I + D + i, Spain' (CSO2011-27494).

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and Greece) remained out of the scope of observation in many of the main works on welfare states published in the 1980s and early 1990s (Flora 1986; Esping-Andersen 1990). The few scholars interested in the Latin rim usually focused on the 'rudimentary' character of welfare programs, the strong influence of Catholicism and its social doctrine, as well as in the central role attributed to the family in the provision of welfare.

Thanks to Ferrera, and a significant number of mostly Southern European researchers, our understanding of the organisational features and overall functioning logic of the Mediterranean model improved significantly. They sketched out the unique historical and policy traits that place this regime apart from others, particularly the Continental welfare regime with which it undoubtedly shares many commonalities. They also recognised the politico-institutional dynamics derived from the distinctive welfare arrangements found in the Mediterranean countries. Growing attention has been given to external pressures and internal constraints faced by Mediterranean welfare states, as well as to what extent there is a distinctive 'Mediterranean' response to such challenges. While researchers were embarked in this scholarly effort, societies in Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal kept changing, transforming the nature of existing arrangements in not always forecasted directions. Do the countries of the Latin rim still belong to the same and distinctive cluster?

It is not easy to give a clear-cut answer to this question. There is little doubt that, in the early 1990s, at the precise moment that the literature on the welfare state was endorsing the threefold partition of the worlds of welfare into the 'Anglo-Saxon', 'Scandinavian' and 'Continental' varieties, the four Southern Europe nations were reaching their peak of commonality, supporting the claim that there was a fourth regime that had been unduly ignored by mainstream research. Such commonality was founded not only in a shared cultural heritage, but also in a distinctive pathway to modernity. Mediterranean societies had had to wait until the 1960s to undergo a process of rapid and highly compressed modernisation, involving not only their economies, but also the social, cultural and political dimensions. In this atypical process, the resulting interplay between the main 'pillars' of welfare provision (labour market, welfare state and family) acquired rather distinctive characteristics, creating a number of distortions and unresolved problems that apparently have also produced a series of relatively common social strains and tensions.

1.1. The Mediterranean labour market

It is undeniable that the Mediterranean labour market, as portrayed in the seminal works on the Mediterranean welfare model, exhibits certain

common traits with the Continental type, beginning with the relatively high unemployment rates (the welfare-without-work syndrome), and the relatively low female participation in the labour force. This not withstanding, some institutional profiles were rather unique to these countries, notably the existence of a clear insider/outsider cleavage. During their industrialisation processes Southern European countries put in place highly protective employment regimes, especially against dismissal of workers from core sectors of the economy (i.e. public administration, large industries, etc.). Stringent employment protection legislation has often been conceptualised as a legacy of the authoritarian/corporatist ideologies influencing policy-makers in the pre-war (Italy) and after-war periods (in the three other countries), and as a consequence of the slow development of unemployment compensation systems (fully introduced only in the 1980s). It has also been argued that the democratic governments that took power in the 1970s and early 1980s in Portugal, Greece and Spain refrained from dismantling the labour legislation inherited from the authoritarian past out of fear for the potential social unrest that could destabilise the transition towards a new political regime (Karamessini 2008).

Thanks to the rigid employment protection legislation enjoyed by workers at the core (most of them males prime-age and older), these groups had high job stability and 'family wages' with strong links to seniority. At the other end of the spectrum, in more peripheral sectors (including a large number of underground economy firms) continuous flows in and out of employment are the norm. Fixed-term contracts, seasonal employment, free-lance activities and internships have provided uneven professional opportunities to a large segment of the workforce (young workers, women and immigrants) under conditions of weak attachment to the labour market, low remuneration, and often lousy working conditions.

As unemployment soared in the late 1970s and early 1980s, governments launched labour deregulation reforms, but each of them chose its own path towards labour market flexibility. Portuguese and Spanish governments introduced measures facilitating the unrestricted use of fixed-term contracts, resulting in a sharp rise in temporary employment and the reinforcement of labour market segmentation. Greek and Italian governments also relaxed the use of fixed-term contracts, but the scope of the reforms they implemented was more limited and the consequences smaller (OECD 2004).In fact during the 1980s temporary employment fell in Greece and it remained low in Italy.

The dual structure of the labour market in Spain, and to a lesser extent in Portugal, encouraged firms to adopt flexibilisation strategies based in the principle of 'last hired, first fired'. In times of economic slowdown, temporary workers assumed the consequences of firms' labour readjustment (Saint Paul 1996). For example, the economic crisis of the

first half of the 1990s, as well as the current economic troubles affecting the Spanish economy, brought youth unemployment rates well over 40% as a result of the destruction of temporary jobs held by the more recent entrants in the labour market. In Italy and Greece the concentration of unemployment risk in the group of temporary workers has been less paramount, although dualism is also a hallmark of their labour markets.

1.2. The Mediterranean welfare state

If we look at the general traits of Southern European welfare states (their scope, financing logics, and underlying organisational features), we could say that this model has many elements in common with the Continental model, while it also shares a few characteristics with the Northern European universalistic type. Cash benefits (especially pensions) have traditionally played a prominent role in the provision of public welfare in Southern Europe. As in 'Bismarkian' regimes, income maintenance is essentially work-related, based both on occupational status and on previous contributions. In line with corporatist countries, the system of social assistance is also weak, offering low levels of protection to citizens not covered by employment-related schemes. In contrast, education and healthcare constitute universal entitlements, basically guaranteed to all citizens (residents) along the lines of the Scandinavian systems.

One of the distinguishing features of this model is supposed to be its fragmentation. As Ferrera (1996) points out, a large number of separate income-maintenance schemes exist in Greece and Italy, some of them very broad and general (i.e. covering 'industrial workers' as a single category), others circumscribed to narrow professional groups. This author recognises that this portrait can hardly be extended to Spain and Portugal, where the level of fragmentation is similar to Continental standards. The main exception are disparate and poorly coordinated non-contributory programmes and services catering for groups defined as deserving beneficiaries (orphans, widows, disabled), leaving other vulnerable groups (new entrants in labour markets, workers in the underground economy, long-term unemployed, inactive people providing informal care to dependants, undocumented migrants, etc.) ineligible for social assistance.

The most distinctive trait emerging of the combinations of dual labour markets and highly fragmented social protection systems is a clear polarisation between well-protected beneficiaries, and a large group of under-/unprotected workers and citizens (Ferrera 1996; Moreno 2006). Some categories of employees (white collar workers, core blue collar workers in medium and large enterprises with permanent contracts, public employees) received relatively generous benefits for short-term social risks (sickness,

maternity, temporary unemployment spells), and relatively generous earning-related pensions, while a large segment of citizens remain vulnerable in relation to those same risks. The strong age-bias orientation of social policies epitomises this situation. While older workers (and the elderly in general) are relatively well protected, younger workers and families remain largely out of the safety net. Youth favouring policies (housing benefits or affordable social housing, childcare, economic support for young households with children) or active labour policies for new entrants into the job market have remained underdeveloped. Italy, Spain and Greece, have the most heavily elderly oriented welfare states in the OECD, with Portugal not far from them (Lynch 2006).

1.3. The Mediterranean family

It has often been argued that welfare and family are much more closely intertwined in Mediterranean countries than in any other welfare regimes. According to this view, the historical presence of strong family ties, and the existence of a familistic value system, constituted the cornerstone of welfare provision, and has had a decisive influence in social-policy making in these countries. The strong institutionalisation of marriage, the availability of full-time housewives, and the intensity of family ties across generations enabled the State to delegate the responsibility for guaranteeing basic economic security and to provide for the care-giving needs of large segments of unprotected citizens, thus helping to keep the political demands for better public provision low. Families functioned traditionally as 'shock absorbers' when its members confronted short-term deprivation (unemployment, family breakdown), or special needs (sickness, dependency or maternity). The State was not expected to intervene, but to concentrate on the protection of the heads of the family. Resource-pooling and inter-generational solidarity expectations within the family also deactivated demands for the de-segmentation of labour markets.

The familistic ethos has been backed by the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, which not only had an important cultural influence, but also played a prominent role in the field of social policy in Italy, Spain and Portugal (wile the Greek Orthodox Church played a functionally equivalent role). The strong emphasis in the role of the family has not been accompanied by social policies that supported families, or strengthened their capacity to care for its members. Rather, the reference to the responsibilities of the family served to legitimise the provision of meagre social services, as well as to overtly justify political inaction in these areas of policies (Saraceno 1994). These characteristics set the Mediterranean model apart from Continental European countries where, although there

is a strong reliance on the family for the provision of care to its members (based on the principle of subsidiarity), the family receives financial support to better perform these roles (Bettio and Plattenga 2004).

2. Southern Europe at the turn of the millennium

While scholars were still highlighting the commonalities in the institutional profiles of the Southern European countries, the newly labelled *regime* was already showing growing signs of internal differentiation. In the context of the economic and political changes of the 1990s, the four countries entered (each at its own pace) into a new stage in which their traditional welfare equilibriums became growingly de-stabilised. At the change were the common external pressures (notably globalisation and European integration), as well as the internal challenges posed by the transformation of their domestic economic and social environments. The paths of institutional adaptation to these challenges varied considerably, placing the four countries in diverse reform trajectories.

Globalisation and Europeanisation exposed countries to common opportunities and constraints. The integration of financial markets restricted national governments' margin of manoeuvre to levy the necessary funds to establish new social programmes by weakening the State's control over national tax bases, and by increasing the costs of financing fiscal deficits. In a context of increased 'exit options', it became more difficult for governments to promote economic environments that guarantee high returns to investors without jeopardising regulatory frameworks and social policies that enjoy wide social support. Faced with these constraints, small differences in the chosen policy options may produce large differences in policy trajectories.

During the 2000s, Southern Europe countries followed different economic developmental paths. While growth continued in Spain and Greece (boosted in both cases by a sharp fall in nominal interests rates in the Euro-zone, and the flow of European structural aid in the case of Greece), it stalled in Italy and Portugal. The effects of global pressures were particularly severe in Portugal, which experienced a dramatic recession with a profound impact on its public finances. The emergence of new players in world trade, as well as the enlargement of the EU towards the East, resulted especially damaging to the Portuguese economy because of its specialisation on relatively unsophisticated labour intensive manufacturing (Royo 2013).

Alongside these global factors, European integration also prompted fiscal austerity and the recalibration of welfare policies. The path towards Monetary Union, with its 'convergence criteria', forced a shift towards

more rigorous fiscal policies in order to 'join Europe'. Not all Southern European countries showed the same commitment to austerity though. Steps aiming at cost containment and towards the reorganisation of welfare provision were taken in Italy, Spain and Portugal, implying the restructuration of benefits to counter unfavourable demographics, and the attenuation of privileges for hyper-protected groups (i.e. pensioners in Italy). The Spanish government was one of the most disciplined pupils, allowing a certain margin to expand in previously undeveloped welfare areas (support for families and fight against social exclusion). At the opposite end public deficits increased in Greece even with robust economic growth (public deficits decreased from 9.2% in 1995, to 3.2% in 1999, 'meeting' the convergence criteria, skyrocketing after the fiscal belt was softened – between 2000 and 2005, public deficits run above 5% annually, and public debt went beyond 130% of the GDP). Among the causes for the lack of fiscal discipline observed in this country was the failure to reform the clientelistic structures of its welfare system (Petmesidou and Mossialos 2005; Matsaganis 2011).

The second source of pressures for Southern European welfare regimes was linked to the transformation of domestic labour markets and social contexts. During the 1990s and early 2000s, these countries experienced an (uncompleted) transition towards a new 'post-industrial' order, which altered occupational structures, as well as family and gender relations. Among other changes, two developments deserve particular attention. First, employment in agriculture and manufacturing accelerated its decline, and services became the main driver of occupational expansion. In this decade the proportion of citizens working in the service sector reached more than half of the working population and kept growing rapidly. The emerging service economy opened new employment opportunities for women and other 'outsiders' (especially new migrants from developing countries), but often at a heavy cost in terms of the quality of those newly created jobs. Low wages and poor-quality jobs had a particularly hard impact on the lives of young people in Southern Europe, and a large number of young people faced major difficulties to reach financial independence, and therefore to exit the parental household. As a result, the Mediterranean youth delayed couple formation, and become first-time parents later than in the rest of Western Europe, thus driving fertility rates to unprecedented low levels. Young families are formed later in the life cycle, and their average size has become considerably smaller.[2]

In addition to changes in employment structures, the transformation in demographics and social environments had considerable implications in

2. This is partly due to a fall in fertility, but also to the growing residential autonomy of the elderly.

these countries. The rise in female employment in post-industrial labour market increased the number of dual earner households, where the family status of the male breadwinner is challenged by the existence of a second source of income (a key asset to maintain desired consumption standards), increasing the difficulties that these families have in reconciling work and family life. Financial autonomy gives women new bargaining capacities, which are prompting rapid changes in gender relations within families, and straining couple relationships, increasingly judged unsatisfactory. In these conditions welfare equilibriums operating under the presumption that care and domestic work would be performed by full-time housewives on an unpaid basis cannot longer be sustained. These equilibriums become less viable because of the growing 'precarisation' of marriage linked to the inclination of many young couples to rely on less stable forms of partnership, as well as the rapidly climbing divorce rates among younger cohorts.

The growing precariousness of employment and social relationships in countries that were not accustomed to fluidity in these domains are bringing to the fore new problems and dilemmas. It is increasingly evident that Southern European countries are not vaccinated against the *new social risks* (NSR) widely described in other European countries (Taylor Gooby 2004; Armingeon and Bonoli 2006). A growing number of people in Southern Europe struggle daily against the consequences of intermittent labour careers, being stuck in a low-skill low-wage occupation (or in a job for which the worker is overqualified), having skills and training that become obsolete, being badly protected against disability or unemployment as a result of an unstable job career, becoming frail and lacking family support, being unable to balance paid work and family responsibilities, becoming a lone parent, etc. NSR, which were virtually absent in Southern Europe before the 1990s, both as a condition bear by a significant amount of people, and as a matter of public discussion, have gained prominence, feeding new discourses on social policy as well as new political dynamics.

The newly acquired prominence of NSR in the political agenda derives only partly from the demographic weight of those who more directly bear these risks (Bonoli 2005). As shown later in Moreno and Mari-Klose's article, NSR and demands related to socio-economic transformations have had a fairly unequal salience in Southern European countries. Their role in framing new political debates about welfare provision in an era of increasing global pressures and budgetary austerity explains their growing relevance. Policies targeting NSR often aim at changing welfare 'as we know it' by promoting spending commitments that 'pay off', and eventually helping re-scale traditional welfare state programmes for 'old risks'. This makes some of these policies appealing to broad constituencies,

which include NSR bearers (often left leaning voters), but also other social and political actors interested in the elimination of perceived 'sources of inefficiency' within the welfare system (i.e., employers, policy experts). The economic benefits of these policies are such that they may favour the formation of broad advocacy coalitions, thus generating new opportunities for policy making. As Bonoli (2005) points out, the outputs of the politics of NSR coverage often take the shape of the inclusion of initiatives of cost containment or retrenchment (in policy areas providing coverage for 'old risks'), and of ('affordable') improvement in the provision of schemes that address NSR, within a single reform.

Three additional factors contributed to open windows of opportunity for reform in areas related to the coverage of NSR in Southern Europe. The first were a series of intellectual inputs coming from EU institutions. During the 1990s, new scholarly understandings of the challenges faced by the 'European social model', as well as ideas and policy solutions to modernise public provision, informed EU directives and recommendations. From there, they poured down into the national political debates, shaping the reflection on the shortcomings of the national welfare states, and re-orienting political attention towards NSR. Certain reforms of social insurance schemes implemented in Italy and Spain (extending compulsory insurance to workers hired under non-standard contracts, or removing penalisations for workers with interrupted and fragmented careers) reflected these concerns for NSR (Jessoula 2007). European guidelines also had a strong influence on policy shifts that involved gender and family issues following EU Directives regulating maternity protection (1992), and parental leave (1996) (Treib and Falkner 2004). The strong commitment shown by some Mediterranean countries to follow these guidelines can be interpreted as the expression of the wish of 'late comer' members to 'catch up' to median EU figures and indicators.

The second factor playing a noticeable role in the salience of NSR was the return to power of left-of centre parties after spending a long time in opposition (Bonoli 2005). In line with what had occurred in other European countries, the pressures to adopt policies that would be noticeably different from those of their predecessors pushed the new left-of-centre governments to advance policies providing coverage for NSR, albeit again with different degrees of commitment. The Zapatero governments in Spain appear as the most ambitious in this respect, answering to high expectations for social policy expansion from its voters after nearly a decade of economic growth and fiscal restraint under the previous Conservative governments. From the mid 2000s onwards, Zapatero's government introduced a wide range of measures to favour NSR bearers, including initiatives to favour the residential autonomy of young people, to promote female employment and the conciliation of work

and family life (through an expansion of childcare and elderly care), and to encourage fertility and help young families through birth grants (Ferrera 2010; Moreno and Marí-Klose 2013).[3] Social protection expenditure on family/children increased well above the European average between 2004 and 2010 (36% over the six-year period, only below the Irish growth in EU-15) (Eurostat 2013). In a climate of economic optimism such measures represented a significant departure from traditional welfare arrangements in Southern Europe. However, expansion along these lines did not last long enough to ensure institutional resilience. Reforms came to a sudden halt in 2008 with the eruption of the financial and economic crisis. In the face of mounting budgetary pressures, the Spanish government opted to put their efforts at saving the core of welfare provision, subjecting the newly created policies targeting NSR to major cutbacks.[4]

The third factor is the activity of regional governments in providing innovative responses to NSR. Decentralisation of substantial welfare responsibilities, coupled with new arrangement for fiscal autonomy, provided the impetus for the expansion of new welfare policies. Regional initiatives pushed welfare growth through 'demonstration effects' and learning processes. Thus, areas of social services in Spain and Italy significantly expanded following decentralisation, resulting in increasing inter-regional divergence in social rights and entitlements later minimised through emulation practices (Moreno 2011). These processes raised concerns about fiscal sustainability, as each regional administration aimed at showing its capability of providing top-class services to be 'no less' than other regions.

3. Economic crisis and the future of the Mediterranean Welfare regime

One of the main characteristics of the current financial and economic crisis is its capacity to reveal the weaknesses of the economic, social and political institutional environments of each country. In the USA, the crisis exposed the irrational nature of speculative banking practices (producing large financial and real state bubbles), and the flaws of the productive

3. Along the same lines, the Socialist government of Socrates in Portugal introduced policies supporting the conciliation of family and work through generous parental leaves and a 'daddy month' that emulated the Scandinavian arrangements (Tavora 2012).
4. Zapatero first, and Rajoy's Conservative government later, concentrated many of their budget cuts on policies targeting NSR. In 2010, Zapatero eliminated the birth grant (2500€ for families of newborns and newly adopted children), and curtailed assistance to young people moving out of parental home. Rajoy's government drained resources devoted to the Law of Dependency and to childcare policies, seriously compromising their sustainability.

sector (decreasing competitiveness, international trade deficits, accumulation of public and private debt) (Stiglitz 2010). In the EU it pointed at the huge imbalances within the countries of the Euro zone, and at the flaws in the design of this common currency area (no coordination mechanisms for economic and fiscal policies) (Pisani-Ferry 2012).

Challenging the positive vision of globalisation that prevailed in the previous decade, and within an increasingly neo-Malthusian atmosphere (scarcity of natural resources, threat of energy and environmental shocks), the crisis introduced in the public and political agendas the debate on the future of Western societies in front to the emergence of the 'BRICS'. The delocalisation of large number of jobs to countries with lower salaries (initially low-skilled, but gradually more qualified), weaker environmental regulations, and little social protection seriously questioned the economic systems of Western European countries. This was particularly true for Southern Europe, countries that greatly benefited of their participation in the Euro during the first years of the functioning of the common currency[5] at the expense of accumulating significant unbalances that weakened the foundations of their economies.[6] With their productivity decreasing, their competitive position in global markets significantly deteriorated, and their fiscal balance increasingly compromised, the financial shock adopted the form of a sovereign-debt crisis in these countries (international investors speculating about the capacity of the 'PIGS' to service their debt,[7] and betting on the break-up of the Euro-zone).

As public and private actors changed their investment and consumption strategies economies slowed down, real state bubbles busted, unemployment soared, and fiscal revenues collapsed in the periphery of the Euro-zone. State's initiatives to bail out banks (responsible of facilitating the accumulation of private debt and fuelling real state bubbles), and public policies aimed at reducing the effects of the 'credit-crunch' on the 'real economy', together with public efforts to minimise the most extreme

5. A stable financial environment (easier access to foreign creditors, historically low interest rates) facilitated the growth of their economies and their convergence with the more advanced European countries (increases in GDP per capita, activity rates, female participation in the labour market).
6. The 'illusion of wealth' resulted in uncompetitive costs structures due to structural inflation differentials, growing trade deficits, a substantial increase of debt (in different combinations of public and private), the development of real state bubbles, an acceleration of investment in infrastructures (sometimes without the adequate cost-benefit analysis), and the arrival of significant immigration flows to occupy the niches of the labour market not wanted by autochthonous workers.
7. The assumption that 'the flying PIGS eventually had to land' has predominated in the media and public opinions of Northern European countries, impregnating the political narrative on the crisis and its solution.

effects of the crisis (unemployment benefits) aggravated the situation of public finances. Political discourses calling for the reduction of public spending, and the implementation of strict austerity measures in Southern Europe, openly recommended the reduction of social rights and welfare entitlements. The EU and IMF programs to bail out the governments of Greece, Ireland, and Portugal included precise demands for cutbacks in social protection programs (pensions, health care and subsidies). The austerity plans signed at the EU level with the objective of sending a clear message to the 'markets', and to reduce the pressure over sovereign debts also came with clear 'recommendations' to introduce structural reforms (in labour markets regulations, pension schemes and other basic welfare programs) that were supposed to facilitate the development of more 'virtuous' economic models in these countries.

The current crisis is clearly operating as an 'analyser', revealing the weak points of the institutional equilibriums of the Mediterranean Welfare regime. The accession to power of Conservative governments in the four Southern European countries took place in a social climate favouring the adoption of 'emergency measures' (especially in the Iberian countries), thus opening a 'window of opportunity' for the redefinition of social protection schemes. The deterioration in the quality of service provision due to cost-containment measures (widely felt across these four countries), the introduction of (additional) co-payments, combined with encouragement to subscribe private insurance may weaken the support for public welfare provision (especially among middle classes that can afford private solutions), eventually opening the gate for deeper welfare retrenchment. The role of families as 'shock absorbers', cushioning extreme forms of social exclusion, constitutes a crucial aspect in this respect. Family micro-solidarity is unlikely to provide support to the extent it did in previous crisis (when family ties and familistic expectations were stronger, and male bread-winners were protected by stringent labour market regulations). The losers from this radical economic overhaul may struggle against the consequences of this crisis in a different world in which resource pooling within families may be less effective in lifting people out of poverty than they had been in the past.

While the countries included under this typology followed relatively divergent trends in recent times, to some extent putting into question the adequacy of the categorisation of a Mediterranean regime, the current situation may strengthen the 'path-dependency' patterns of those social protection systems, re-enforcing the commonalities shared by their welfare systems while diluting some of the most innovative developments implemented in this region in the years immediately before the crisis.

4. Structure of the Special issue

The articles presented in this Special Issue examine the recent evolution of the Mediterranean Welfare regime, and how the current financial challenges may contribute to redefine its basic traits in the near future. From the macro comparative analysis of long-term socio-demographic trends, to the study of specific welfare programs in a country, these papers use a variety of methods and approaches to review the specificities of the Mediterranean Welfare regime. They also share an interest in analysing the role that the transformations experienced by Southern European societies in recent years may have had over the defining boundaries of this Welfare regime ideal-type. In this respect, the analysis of some of the most important social and demographic transformations experienced by these societies, such as the ageing of the population, the increasing participation of women in the labour market, the decreasing expectations about care within the family at old age, and/or the role of migration to respond to some of the challenges posed by these transformations, constitute a structuring argument for the contributions included in this volume.

A second argument that cuts across several of the articles of this Special Issue is the relation between social values and the main characteristics of the Mediterranean Welfare regime, and how the relation between societal and value change, and the evolution of welfare policies in these countries can be analyzed. Some of the basic characteristics of this regime type are supposed be strongly grounded in axiological foundations of these societies (familistic tendencies, clientelism, lack of generalised trust, etc.). The extent to which those values may actually diverge from those of the rest of Europe, and whether they may have evolved in recent years as a consequence of the modernisation process experienced by these societies (Calzada *et al.* 2013), may also be extremely relevant when analysing the evolution of welfare schemes in Southern European countries.

The impact of the current fiscal and economic crisis on the Welfare regimes of these countries constitutes a third analytical axis for the papers included in this volume. This last aspect emerges as particularly important, since it is linked to the issue of the allegiance of citizens to the social contract in which the State guarantees basic social rights financed through (more or less) progressive taxation systems in exchange for legitimacy of the political system. This is especially relevant in a region that experienced a process of transition towards democratic regimes only (relatively) recently and where the risk of de-legitimatisation of the political systems/regimes/parties seems to be particularly important.

The first of the papers included in this Special Issue examines the extent to which some of the features that cluster South European

countries into a distinctive Welfare regime may actually be blurring, prompted by changes in the interface between new attitudes, expectations and practices, and the public and private provision of social policies. As Moreno and Mari-Klose point out, the interaction between families, the State, and the market in the Mediterranean Welfare regime has been traditionally based on the existence of a strong household micro-solidarity. Supported in the caring work of women, this arrangement has provided high levels of self-perceived well-being at the expense of erratic careers or women's full withdrawal from the labour market. After a comparative analysis of socio-demographic trends in Europe, these authors point out how new lifestyles and social needs of younger generations are challenging the capacity of the family to continue functioning as 'shock absorber' and supplier of informal care. In this new scenario Southern European countries are caught in the choice of maintaining deep-seated cultural arrangements, or promoting new welfare programs to accommodate the demands and aspirations of younger cohorts. The pace and scope of these social transformations differs quite considerable across countries though, increasing the degree of internal variation within the Mediterranean regime and, quite significantly, the intra-variation within each country.

The contribution of Calzada and Brooks analyses the extent to which patterns of family structure and values in Europe appear to be connected to ideal-typical regimes, as predicted by the Welfare regimes and the gender/family relations literatures. These authors focus their analysis of European attitudes towards welfare policies on the study of the relation between the pattern of family structure/values and the attitudes towards service-oriented welfare states. Their analysis tests the hypothesis that family values and attitudes depress support for public interventions in this area of policy. By paying particular attention to the Mediterranean regime they show how, contrary to what could be derived from the literature on the topic, the relationship between family values and attitudes toward government child care provision is clearly positive. Far from eroding support for public child care services, family values appear to increase preferences for public provision in this area of policy.

Torres, Coelho and Cabrita's article also focuses on the change in family patterns, values and practices in Southern European countries and the political responses to those changes, particularly in Portugal. The authors claim that social scientists should update old categories of analysis to understand the changes that are transforming these societies in fundamental ways. In their view the indiscriminate use of old familistic frameworks is contributing to portray a distorted image of these societies. The article identifies drivers of change in Portugal, both at the demographic level (a new generation of better educated and cosmopolitan generations) and the political level (centre-left governments). Current

trends prompt a convergence with Europe. But the authors are cautious in pointing out that such convergence is incomplete. Institutional constraints, especially regarding public welfare provision, continue to place a heavy burden on women's backs along 'traditional' lines.

The paper by Caïs and Folguera analyses the changes in intergenerational dynamics of family solidarity in Spain, and the factors (reciprocity, affection or duty) that affect the willingness to provide care for elderly dependent relatives. Through the combination of quantitative and qualitative empirical evidence they study the way in which changes in family dynamics, higher female labor market participation, the scarcity of public services, and the high cost of private services are affecting family caregiving strategies in this country. They conclude that the Mediterranean Welfare regime appears as increasingly ineffective. The sustainability of the Spanish elderly care model seems particularly troubled by the current context of budget austerity and retrenchment of the incipient policies developed in recent years.

The fifth paper by Da Roit, González and Moreno-Fuentes, analyses the relation between long-term-care policies and female employment in the care sector. Policies in this domain appear weak and fragmented in Southern Europe when compared to other regimes. The authors claim that it is precisely this weakness that can be considered responsible for the emergence of an informal care market staffed by migrant workers, often undocumented, and trapped in the underground economy. This situation, studied for the cases of Italy and Spain, has important implications for the development of long-term-care policies in these countries by defining an unregulated, precarious (and cheaper) scheme for the provision of care at the expense of the working conditions of the care-providers, their professionalisation, and the quality of care provided.

The paper by Petmesidou, centred on the study of the case of Greece, examines the limitations and deadlocks of welfare patterns embedded in the statist-familistic Welfare regime that for a long-time was pivotal for the institutional set up and social redistribution in that country. The cumulative nature of the social protection schemes built over several decades, and the effects of the current sovereign debt crisis on the Greek Welfare system, are analysed in an article reviewing the main reforms recently introduced under the pressure of foreign creditors.

The last paper of the volume by Andreotti, Mignone and Pratschke focuses on the Italian internal variation in female labour market participation and family responsibilities equilibriums. The goal of the paper is to challenge the image of a linear, continuous and convergent change in gender relations in Italy. The two distinct social 'sub-models' identified by the authors (related to distinct forms of modernisation) have far reaching consequences for gender relations and the well-being of

households. Women in Northern Italy face increasing problems to reconcile professional and family responsibilities, and the delicate intergenerational solidarity arrangements look increasingly precarious. In the South, in contrast, large reserves of mostly low-qualified women remain outside the labour market in a state of discouragement, placing their households at risk of falling below the poverty line. The economic crisis has brought tensions within each model, accentuating differences between the regions, thus intensifying the need for policy innovation while obstructing the development of coherent policy responses.

During the 1990s and early 2000, a group of scholars established research on the Southern Europe Welfare model as a fertile ground for comparative analysis. Their views on the distortions introduced by the shared cultural traits of the Mediterranean countries, as well as by their distinctive pathways to modernity are worth revisiting today. The tensions and strains currently experienced by these countries exhibit a multifaceted nature and are to a great extent the consequence of recent developments, only partially linked to that common heritage. In this context it is of utmost importance that social sciences review and update frequently unquestioned understandings to contribute informing public debates and policy decision making in a balanced and productive manner.

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Pau Marí-Klose, Assitant Professor at the University of Zaragoza. His research interests lie in areas of childhood poverty, family relations, and social policies. He is currently the principal investigator of an R + D+ I project financed by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness that studies the interface between transformations in families and social policies in Spain. He has published nine books and several articles. His books include: *Childhood and the Future* (2010) and *Edad del Cambio* (2006). E-mail: pmklose@unizar.es

Francisco Javier Moreno Fuentes, Research Fellow at the Institute of Public Goods and Policies (IPP-CSIC). His main areas of interest are centred in the comparative analysis of public policies within the European region, with a special focus in the study of welfare regimes and their transformation, as well as in immigration and urban policies. He published several books, chapters in edited volumes, as well as articles in Spanish (REIS, Política y Sociedad) and international journals (Politics & Society, IMR, IJURR, JHPPL, Global Networks). Institute of Public Goods and Policies, Madrid, Spain. E-mail: javier.moreno@cchs.csic.es